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Making Time and Finding Time by Sean Sanders

It will always be difficult to explain an abstract concept to a child, or the color red to someone that has never seen it. It is just as difficult to explain the spirit of Senshin Center and Sensei's teachings to an "outsider" - i.e. one who does not train, or maybe even one who does not train with us. God knows I have faced many odd stares when I attempted to explain why we do what we do to non-practitioners. Sometimes, on their face, it is bewilderment, sometimes it is disbelief, and others just dismiss it as something they will never understand. Long ago, I stopped explaining our Aikido training to outsiders, unless they insisted by their questioning. Today, I much prefer to use Iseri Sensei's approach of, "Why don't you just come and try it."

People who are not members of Senshin Center will naturally find the intended training protocol and the actual training hours themselves to be odd or challenging. Class times fall outside of the normal "prime time" hours held by most commercial martial arts training halls. However, I actually think we members consider these hours to be normal hours. We also see the minimum training requirements as a natural part of our practice. This perception stems most likely from our shared position that we should work to have a body/mind that can train anytime, any day, anywhere.

We all have intended training schedules. Unlike any other dojo I have ever seen, or heard of, the norm at Senshin Center is to let Sensei know when we will not be able to make an intended class. In most other places, students come and go as they please, with little consideration for the dojo or the sensei. Our way of making a commitment to training, and then showing responsibility and consideration for that commitment, is the only way most of us at Senshin Center know how to train. However, one should not fail to understand how important this aspect is to developing maturity in our practice. When all the excuses for not attending class pop into our head (as a result of fatigue, work, fear, etc.), this system is a very positive and powerful driving force. As such, it can offer us aid. Left to our own devices, we could and probably would wither under such negative pressures to interrupt our training unnecessarily.

Whenever I have considered missing a class, often thinking I was doing the more positive thing by not going, I was kick-started by this (intended schedule) system. Making it to class, I have never had a negative experience – class was never not worth the extra self-discipline. During those classes that I "almost didn't make," I typically found that I would have missed something precious if I had given in to the "weakness" and not attended. With Senshin Center, every class missed is a lost opportunity, not merely another class missed. This last point makes our intended training schedules very practical.

So, how do we manage to make as many classes as possible?

Surely, there has to be a desire in the first place to find the Path and to then remain on it as truthfully as one can. The number of classes you attend is not necessarily the governing factor at Senshin Center, but it is the most important way for the beginner to cultivate him/herself properly. With each class, you expose yourself to the mat, the etiquette, and the culture, and you further cultivate a relationship with Sensei. These are all vital elements to absorbing the Art. Though we know all this, work and home-life prevent most of us from training full-time, so we do the next best thing, and schedule training around these obligations. Of course there are many other things we could do with our time, but we have all chosen to make Aikido an important part of our lives, so the "sacrifices" are not seen as such. However, is this "next best thing" a "best thing" at all?

In a recent discussion with Sensei, he pointed out that most serious practitioners DO NOT use only their non-work days for training - meaning, training only during so-called "free time" is quite unusual for the serious aikidoka. Sensei has said that to wait to train until it is convenient is type of immaturity that we should strive to train through. Immaturity is a necessary step, to be sure, but it is only a step, not a final destination. This I feel is Sensei's point. Therefore, we should work to move beyond this way of relating to class times. We need to work to make a shift in perspective, we need to work to move from "having time" to train to "making time" to train.

We need to understand that there is another level of existence, one where the responsibilities of work, family, etc., and training can mesh beautifully. At times, especially at the beginning, this is often impossible to imagine. Therefore, we come to the training hours and see them not as avenues to mature. Rather they become reasons for halting our training. For some they even become reasons for not commencing our training. Yet, class times and the minimum training requirements should never be a factor in such decisions. To start training in Budo according to whether or not the training hours themselves coincide with our free time is do ourselves a great disservice. To train or not to train in Aikido, to join Senshin Center or not to join Senshin Center, based upon when class is or when it is not, or based upon what kind of requirements the dojo has in place, is to train out of convenience. We can never jump from convenience to spiritual maturity, or from convenience to harmonizing training with the whole of our life.

Instead, we need to step into training more fully, so that we can feel the joys that shugyo can provide. We are all busy and all have responsibilities of various sorts, but I think this is an important point to be aware of as our minds and bodies are being prepared to enter the next dimension of our practice. There, in that higher state of spiritual maturity, where we are supposed to be, hours and times will have no such significance. The problem of training will always be a "problem" if we cannot let go of this idea of "finding time." We cannot mark our training by how easy it is to train. One thing I have learned through Budo is that when things begin to seem too effortless, too easy, too "dreamy," we are more likely in a state of delusion than reality. Therefore, ease should not mark whether we have gained a harmony between our lives and our training.

Budo challenges us to put our training to work by working with our training. In this regards, I see no difference with what we do on the mat and what we do in life. We have to be centered, focused, aware, acceptable of things, and flexible on and off the mat. To lock ourselves into a rigid technique in the midst of a spontaneous training session is to introduce delusion - for nothing is ever fully predictable and/or constant. To believe or hold that we should have only one way of relating to our training, one that can exist without adaptation, transition, etc., is also to live in delusion. Our lives off the mat have to show this same consideration for alteration. Therefore, we should not expect to train the same way five years into our

training as we do five days into our training. Differences must be allowed for in terms of both logistics and how that training is experienced. Further along in our training, we will see that the “difficulty” we face in incorporating training time into our lives is the filter itself that purifies our spirit. When we work to harmonize training with life beyond the delusion of convenience, we remove the extraneous elements because we MUST. We prioritize the elements of our lives because we MUST. If these things are not done, it is only a matter of time before the "other" things in life drown out our training. It is only a matter of time before we quit. In prevention of such an inevitability, I would like to offer some practical suggestions for integrating training with living (for lack of a better word):

- First, decide that training is what you want to do. With that desire, you can gain the power necessary to make the changes you need to make in your life in order to train. Without this desire, life will always be at odds with your practice; your practice will always be at odds with your life.
- Prioritize what is important in your life, and work to adapt or even eliminate the rest.
- It helps immensely to surround yourself with like-minded individuals. The dojo is a great place to find them! Understand that the dojo is a kind of spiritual family. Draw strength from that. Know that you are not the first to feel what you feel, nor the last, nor the only one. Sharing and peer support can offer great aid. Though Budo is ultimately a solitary journey, you will still need to meet some good people to share the journey with along the way.
- Come to THIS class! Do not worry about the next class, or the one after that. Come to train and be HERE, be here, right now. Then when the next class comes (which would then be THIS class), repeat this process.
- Most of all keep walking! Practice what can be called "patient impatience." Progress is not a passive activity. Respect the power of time to transform you, but realize time alone will do little for you if you do nothing for you. Actively seek progress, let time assist.

Before you know it, years will have passed and you will simply be on the Path. Along the way, it will be hard; it will be easy. You will laugh, you will cry. You will realize your ignorance. You will awaken.